



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

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TWO MEXICAN NATIONALS EXTRADITED FROM MEXICO FOUND GUILTY IN NACO, ARIZ. DRUG TUNNEL CASE

TUCSON, Ariz. - Francisco Valle-Hurtado, 38, and Ruben Ultreras-Estrada, 38, both of Naco, Sonora, Mexico, extradited to the U.S. in May 2006 to face trial for cocaine charges related to the Naco, Ariz. drug tunnel, were found guilty here yesterday by a federal jury in U.S. District Court. Over 20 tons of cocaine had been smuggled through the tunnel from its inception in 1996 until May 1999 when the tunnel was discovered. Both defendants were convicted of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute 17,715 pounds of cocaine. Francisco Valle-Hurtado was also convicted of possessing a machine gun while committing the cocaine violations.

Ultreras-Estrada assisted with getting the cocaine from remote air strips in Mexico, where it had been flown by the Juarez and Tijuana drug cartels, to the tunnel entrance in Naco, Sonora, Mexico. He also oversaw part of the transportation organization based in Arizona. Valle-Hurtado guarded the cocaine loads with a machine gun after the loads had passed through the tunnel.

The investigation began after the seizure of 5.6 tons of cocaine from a warehouse in Tucson in December 1996. During the course of the investigation an additional 2660 pounds of cocaine, three fully automatic machine guns and 1.5 million in cash were seized. Over fifty people connected to the Naco tunnel have been convicted; five remain at large.

Daniel G. Knauss, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, stated, "The success in bringing drug traffickers to justice is due to the diligence and combined efforts of law enforcement on both sides of the border."

Federal Bureau of Investigation Special Agent in Charge John E. Lewis indicated the significance of this verdict stating, "Regardless if it is drugs, guns, or persons being illegally trafficked across our borders, this is a verdict having national security implications and is reflective of the FBI's longstanding commitment, along with our partners, to protect this nation on all fronts."

"This verdict is the result of law enforcement on both sides of the border working together to effectively dismantle major drug organizations," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Elizabeth W. Kempshall. "DEA and its partners are committing to follow through and bring those individuals responsible to justice as well as to block their smuggling routes into this county."

"By shutting down this tunnel and the criminal organization behind it, ICE and its law enforcement partners were able to keep thousands of pounds of narcotics off of the streets of our communities," said Richard Crocker, Deputy special Agent in Charge of the ICE office of investigations in Tucson. "The public benefits when federal and state law enforcement agencies

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can work with our partners across the border to bring all of our authorities to bear on these complex cases.”

Roger Vanderpool, Director of the Arizona Department of Public Safety stated, “The Arizona Department of Public Safety is proud to have taken part in this case. The two men convicted were engaged in an effort to poison our communities by importing illegal drugs into the United States through a Tunnel from Mexico. The investigation by DPS and federal law enforcement agencies along with the subsequent prosecution of this criminal matter go a long way toward helping to achieve Governor Napolitano's Secure Arizona Initiative.”

Sentencing for both defendants is set for January 18, 2008 at 10:00 a.m. in front of U.S. District Court Chief Judge John M. Roll. A conviction for cocaine trafficking carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, a \$4 million fine or both. A conviction for the firearms charge carries a maximum sentence of not less than 30 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Roll will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

The investigation preceding yesterday's verdict was conducted by FBI, DEA, ICE and the Arizona Department of Public Safety. The prosecution is being handled by James T. Lacey, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

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